obtaining information from the anonymous club member to complete a benefit transaction and providing the benefit to the anonymous club member when the value token is verified.

REMARKS

Reconsideration of the above referenced application in view of the enclosed amendment and following remarks is requested. Existing claims 1-21, and 24-25 remain in the application.

ARGUMENT

Claims 1-6, 8-12, 14-17, and 20-26 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(e) as being clearly anticipated by Laor (US Pat. 6,076,069).

The present invention is a method of securely passing a value token between affiliated web sites in an electronic commerce system so that a user may gain the benefit of a promotional discount or special offer from at least one of the affiliated web sites. The present invention establishes a sufficient level of trust between the member's web browser, a club manager and the affiliate web site in order to establish the user's membership in a jointly marketed club, that the affiliate is a trusted partner in the club, and that the user may receive a benefit without disclosing his or her identity. With the present invention, the club manager does not need to know the identity of the club member desiring the benefit. This enables anonymous web-based cross company marketing programs. The present invention is simpler than prior art systems having multiple merchant and banking entities in that it involves only two entities, the club manager and an affiliate, who cooperate to offer the benefit without explicit arrangement by the club member. Embodiments of the present invention allow potentially valuable benefits to be given anonymously to club members with protection against fraud, the ability to recover in light of incomplete transactions, and the ability to bill back to the club manager in a trackable fashion. In addition, the invention minimizes the complexity of the electronic commerce

system and the transfer of a user's personal information between web sites. The present invention provides for a benefit provision by using existing World Wide Web (WWW) mechanisms and features, without the need for an electronic wallet or electronic coupon applet to be used.

Laor teaches of a system for distributing and redeeming electronic coupons. In Laor, the electronic coupon is distributed as a data structure or file known in the art as a "cookie". In Laor, the cookie is generated by a first server and stored on the user's computer system. When a user is surfing the WWW and arrives at a vendor's web site that is affiliated with the first server, a second server operating the vendor's web site interrogates the cookie stored on the user's computer to determine if the user has any valid electronic coupons. When the user (through his or her browser) inquires about goods or services of the vendor, the second server communicates with a third server to authenticate the electronic coupon data present in the cookie and provides a discount if the data in the cookie is valid.

Note the intrusiveness of the scheme taught by Laor. In Laor's system, the first server knows information about the user's computer system in order to load the cookie. Further, the first server explicitly stores the cookie on the user's hard drive. Additionally, the second server actively interrogates the cookie stored on the user's computer system in determining whether to grant the discount. Finally, Laor's system apparently has no provisions for anonymously obtaining an electronic coupon by the user.

In marked contrast, the present invention is very non-intrusive from the perspective of the user. In this invention, no cookie or other data structure resident on the user's computer system is used and the value token generated by the club member and used by the affiliate is never stored on the user's (i.e., club member's) computer system. It has been well documented in the press in the past few years how various privacy advocates groups have been criticizing the widespread use of cookies by many web sites. The present invention avoids this criticism by implementing a solution to the problem of cross company marketing on the web without using a cookie stored on the user's hard drive. The present invention allows the user to remain anonymous and avoids storing a cookie (or value token) on the

user's system. In order to more particularly define the present invention, these features have been added as limitations to independent claims 1, 6, 10, 12, 17, 24 and 25.

In addition, unlike in Laor, in the present system the value token is generated by the club manager after the user registers and communicated directly to the affiliate web site. The value token is not handled or stored by the user's computer system. Instead it is passed directly from the club manager to the affiliate. This provides additional assurance that an unscrupulous user cannot "hack" or "spoof" the value token to get additional benefits that he or she is not entitled to according to the rules set up by the club manager and the affiliates. The user can't hack the value token because the user never "sees" it on their computer system (unlike the cookie implementation of Laor) since it passes directly from the club manager to the affiliate. In order to more particular define the invention, this feature has also been added to claims independent claims 1, 6, 10, 12, 17, 24 and 25.

For both of the above stated reasons, independent claims 1, 6, 10, 12, 17, 24 and 25 are now allowable. In addition, all claims dependent from these independent claims are also allowable.

Claim 7 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Laor in view of Eggleston et al. (US Pat. 6,061,660). Since claim 7 is dependent from allowable independent claim 6, it is also allowable.

Claim 13 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Laor in view of Scroggie et al. (US Pat. 6,185,541). Since claim 13 is dependent from allowable independent claim 12, it is also allowable.

Claim 18 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Laor in view of Barnett et al. (US Pat. 6,321,208). Since claim 18 is dependent from allowable independent claim 17, it is also allowable.

Claim 19 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Laor in view of Eggleston et al. Since claim 19 is dependent from allowable independent claim 17, it is also allowable.

Claim 21 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Laor in view of Barnett et al. (US Pat. 6,321,208). Since claim 21 is dependent from allowable independent claim 17, it is also allowable.

CONCLUSION

In view of the foregoing, Claims 1-21, and 24-25 are all in condition for allowance. If the Examiner has any questions, the Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned at (503) 264-8074. Early issuance of Notice of Allowance is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,

Dated: 2/7/02

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DEBORAH L. HIGHAM
Name of Person Mailing Correspondence

Signature *Date*

Copy of claims as amended in this response:

1. (once amended) A club manager for managing a club in an electronic commerce system having a user and at least one affiliate comprising:

a registration function to register the user as [a]an anonymous club member; and

a credential creation function to create a value token associating the anonymous club member with a benefit provided by the at least one affiliate of the club manager, to cryptographically sign the value token to create a credential, and to communicate the credential directly to the at least one affiliate without storing the value token by the anonymous club member, for fulfillment of the benefit.

6. (once amended) An affiliate in an electronic commerce system for providing benefits to users that are members of a club controlled by a club manager comprising:

a credential verification function to receive a credential including a value token directly from the club manager, the value token associating a user with entitlement to a benefit as [a]an anonymous club member, and to verify the authenticity of the credential; and

a benefit provision function to provide the benefit to the anonymous club member if the value token is valid.

10. (once amended) An electronic commerce system comprising:

a club manager to register a user as [a]an anonymous club member, to create a value token associating the club member with entitlement to a benefit, and to cryptographically sign the value token to create a credential; and

at least one affiliate to receive the credential directly from the club manager, to verify the authenticity of the value token of the credential, and to provide the benefit to the anonymous club member if the value token is valid.

12. (once amended) In an electronic commerce system, a method of allowing a user to obtain a benefit from at least one affiliate because the user is a member of a club, comprising:

registering the user as [a]an anonymous member of the club;

creating a value token associating the anonymous club member with entitlement to the benefit;

cryptographically signing the value token to create a credential; and

communicating the credential directly to the at least one affiliate without storing the value token by the anonymous club member.

17. (once amended) In an electronic commerce system, a method of providing a benefit to a member of a club controlled by a club manager comprising:

directly receiving a credential signed by the club manager, the credential including a value token associating [a]an anonymous club member with entitlement to a benefit;

verifying authenticity of the value token; and

obtaining information from the anonymous club member to complete a benefit transaction and providing the benefit to the anonymous club member when the value token is verified.

22. Cancelled.

23. Cancelled.

24. (once amended) An article comprising: a machine readable medium having a plurality of machine readable instructions, wherein when the instructions are executed by a processor, the instructions allow a user to obtain a benefit from at least one affiliate because the user is a member of a club in an electronic commerce system, by

registering the user as [a]an anonymous member of the club;

creating a value token associating the anonymous club member with entitlement to the benefit;

cryptographically signing the value token to create a credential; and

communicating the credential directly to the at least one affiliate without storing the value token by the anonymous club member, for fulfillment of the benefit.

25. (once amended) An article comprising: a machine readable medium having a plurality of machine readable instructions, wherein when the instructions are executed by a processor, the instructions coordinate provision of a benefit by an affiliate to a member of a club controlled by a club manager in an electronic commerce system by:

directly receiving a credential signed by the club manager, the credential including a value token associating [a]anonymous club member with entitlement to a benefit;

verifying authenticity of the value token; and

obtaining information from the anonymous club member to complete a benefit transaction and providing the benefit to the anonymous club member when the value token is verified.

26. Cancelled.